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Philosophy Looks at Religion

By Richard Wilson Boynton

A natural beginning for the discussion of our topic would be by way of defining our terms. What are we to mean, in the present connection, by philosophy and what by religion? The words themselves are highly abstract; that is, each stands before the mind as a conventional sign or symbol for an uncounted multitude of particular facts to which it points, or which as we say it means. In strict literalness, philosophy never did look at religion, never will look at religion, never can look at religion; because, as concrete existences, there is no philosophy to look, and no religion to be looked at.

What we are to have in mind, then, is the following: During the past twenty-five hundred years, a succession of especially endowed persons have appeared on the stage of the world called philosophers, a word meaning originally "lovers of wisdom," whose systems of belief and practice we sum up in the general term philosophy. Philosophers, and their respective philosophies, have existed as concrete data of experience; and it is these concrete data—these particular men and their systematic ways of thinking—that we have in mind and intend to signify when we use the abstract general term, philosophy. The same situation exists with respect to the abstract general term, religion. Ever since man has been man, as far back as we can trace in the obscure records of prehistoric time any of those traits that are properly human, we find exhibited the peculiar attitude that we call religious. As to what religion is, there is far from being complete agreement among its interpreters. A definition which seems to me to cover the main points is that it is an endeavor to conserve socially recognized values by means of an Agent toward whom the attitude taken is one of absolute dependence.* However this may be, the

*W. K. Wright, in *A Student's Philosophy of Religion.*

term religion means or points to all the men who have been religious, and all their ways of being religious, from the beginning until now.

Philosophy and religion, then, are abstract general terms signifying human attitudes or pursuits that, in some ways distinct, are nevertheless related. Wherein lies the difference between them? Let me suggest three outstanding characteristics of each wherein they differ. A philosophy is most often the possession of an individual, more rarely of a group or school, it is prevailingly a thinking attitude, and it functions mainly in the direction of theory. A religion is generally the possession of a community, sometimes of an entire civilization, it is prevailingly a feeling attitude, and it functions mainly in the direction of practice. While differing in quite fundamental respects, historically there has always been a close reciprocal relation between philosophy and religion; and it is this relation, in some of its aspects, that we are to consider under the topic—Philosophy looks at Religion.

I.

There are various ways of translating this statement into substantially equivalent terms. Thus, a given philosopher looks at a given religious community and merely registers his opinion of it, favorable or otherwise. Again, a philosopher may himself be religious, a member of some religious group, yet as an individual accustomed to do his own thinking he may feel the need of making some adjustment between his private opinions and his public or communal feeling and action as the adherent of a certain religion. Once more, whether himself religious or not in his private capacity, a philosopher may conceive it to be a part of his theorizing activity to stand somewhat aloof from all particular religions, in order to frame for himself a general conviction regarding the religious element in human nature, which will fit in with the other parts of his system of philosophic beliefs. Or, lastly, a philosopher may take up a purely negative attitude toward all religious phenomena, as merely so many examples of baseless delusion, having no

place in the systematic consideration of the normal relations of man to man, or of man to the universe. Historical examples of all four types of attitude, of ways in which given philosophers have looked at given phases of religion, could easily be cited.

Mention of such examples may well remind us that the topic we are concerned with has had a large place in the history both of philosophy and of religion. Ever since there was any philosophy, religion has been something at which it has had to look most persistently. From the sixth century before Christ, when philosophy first made its appearance in the world of western civilization, down to the present moment, philosophers and men of religion have been looking at each other, sometimes with mutual understanding and appreciation, but more generally with distrust and antagonism. Such public religion as existed in Athens, for example, at the end of the fifth and the beginning of the fourth century B. C., was unwilling to permit philosophy in the person of Socrates to live, but put him to death on the charge of rejecting the gods of the state and corrupting its youth. Likewise, two thousand years later, in 1600 A. D., religion in the form of Roman Catholic Christianity burned at the stake the philosopher Giordano Bruno, with the similar futile aim of suppressing his teachings. During the Middle Ages, for the most part, religion in its organized form made of philosophy its tool or its slave, philosophy being allowed no free and independent status of its own but required to serve the sole purpose of giving some sort of rational plausibility to inherited theological dogmas. On the other hand, the philosophy of the eighteenth century—based on the great scientific advances of the preceding generations—became hostile to religion in its prevailing forms and did so much to discredit it in the better minds of the time that this particular century, one of the most remarkable in other respects, stands out as the most irreligious in the records of modern civilization. Whereas today, one type of traditional religious belief calling itself Fundamentalism is putting forth an effort—with a degree of success not to be despised—to prevent by legislative enactment the teaching in tax-supported schools of a philosophy of evolution; another type

of belief known as Modernism is seeking from philosophy the reconciling and co-ordinating principles which will enable contemporary religious ideas to assimilate something of the prevailing points of view in science and scientific method generally.

However, it would be far too complicated an undertaking if I were to attempt to set forth the relations of philosophy and religion historically. I must greatly simplify my task by considering the relation of philosophy as such to religion as such; Philosophy being, as I have defined it, on the whole an individual, thinking, theorizing attitude, and religion being, in the main and generally speaking, a social, feeling, and practicing attitude.

What, now, is the philosopher like, and when he builds his system of philosophy what is he trying to construct? Well, he is trying to construct a total, all-inclusive vision of the universe and human life, seen from the point of view that he happens to occupy as a particular man, living and thinking in a definite intellectual environment, at a given moment of history. Philosophy as a whole, viewed as a succession of such endeavors, is a series of systematic interpretations of the entire range of human experience. Thinking necessarily implies something thought about, and so the philosopher has to gather his materials from the attempts that are made in various directions to deal with aspects of our experience in detail. In this sense, nothing human is alien to him, but today he is chiefly concerned with trying to unify the deliverances of two contrasted sides of our nature—the intellectual quest of truth and the emotional need for conserving values, or science and religion. The ancient Greeks, who gave us philosophy, gave us also the beginnings of science. At first the two were scarcely discriminated; the scientist and the philosopher were one and the same person, as has been the case with some notable instances in more recent times. But from the epoch of Copernicus and Galileo, science in the modern world has progressively drawn apart from philosophy, and worked for the most part in independence of it. From the point of view of the philosopher, this independence is more apparent than real. Religion, also, especially since the

Protestant Reformation, has tended to work in a field of its own and to be suspicious of philosophy and even hostile to it. This seems to the philosopher a misfortune for both philosophy and religion; but for religion most of all. In what follows I shall try to give reasons for these conclusions.

II.

The relation of philosophy to science is perhaps best described as one of division of labor. In spirit, method and ultimate purpose, the two are one. Both are set on discovering the nature of things. Science divides in order to conquer; that is, as we may say, it works departmentally, while philosophy ever strives to keep the whole in mind. Astronomy, geology, physics, chemistry, biology, physiology, psychology, anthropology, ethnology, sociology, and whatever other sciences there may be, represent the concerted endeavors of groups of keen-minded investigators to acquire exact and exhaustive knowledge in some one limited field of research—such as, the heavenly bodies, the structure of the earth, the nature and relations of matter and energy, of organism and environment, of animal and human behavior, of the activities of human beings in social groups and communities. The results attained by scientific inquiry at any given period might be likened to pieces of a mosaic which, if the parts could be fitted together, would give a picture of the nature of things so far as science is able to disclose it. Only, it does not happen to be the function of any department of science to put the pieces together.

There is another point of importance to be noted. All the sciences cover only a small part of the wide realm of human experience. Science is knowledge, but by no means the whole even of that; whereas there is vastly more than knowledge in our lives as we live them. Life is feeling, acting, enjoying, suffering, appreciating, loving, serving, cooperating, worshipping, and more besides. Science may be looked at as a human institution, that is, a concerted way of doing some particular thing, in this case acquiring exact and demonstrable knowledge. But there are many human institutions, such as the family, edu-

cation, art, morality, religion, business, politics, sport, and doubtless others. There is no question that each of these institutional attitudes of ours, as we may call them, has something to contribute to our total vision of life. Besides all this, we must reckon in the experiences that come to us as individuals—our joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, successes and failures—which mingle with what we know and with what institutional attitudes we take to form the texture of our personal faiths and doubts. Now all these extra-scientific influences have to be brought, to some extent, within the ken of the philosopher as an interpreter of life. In Plato's splendid phrase, he is "the spectator of all time and of all existence." He stands within our human world, and yet at a slight remove from its incessant whirl and noise, exposed to every wind of doctrine, and trying to spell out and put together the meaning of the whole. Of course, no individual philosopher ever quite succeeds; but in so far as he does succeed, all the pieces in the mosaic of knowledge and experience are joined in a coherent pattern, and the synoptic vision is for the time being complete.

When the philosopher looks at religion, he finds it confronting a task in many respects akin to his own. For religion, also, purports to be an interpretation of life in all its length and breadth and depth and height. It is, of course, more than that. It is an attempt also to reconcile us to, and bring us into harmony with, the universe of which we are a part and the God who is its indwelling spirit. In its historic forms, religion has covered an enormous range of human beliefs, feelings and endeavors. It has undergone a prolonged evolution, and exists today in all parts of the world in such a complex variety of manifestations that no single mind can grasp them all. No more than with the detailed results of science is the philosopher concerned with this mass of particular facts in the religions of the world. He is trying to get a vision of the whole, and an essential part of his task is to fit religion into the mosaic together with all the other important aspects of the universal life.

Now a given religion, like Christianity, is a living force,

a vital movement, in human affairs. As we analyze it, we find it to consist of beliefs, attitudes and practices which have a general family resemblance through the ages, but which undergo change from one century to another and from one part of the world to another. Probably there is no type of Christianity anywhere on earth today that does not contain some element that would be familiar to any Christian who ever lived. Yet many revolutions in thought have taken place since the first disciples of Jesus were sent forth to preach the gospel to the nations, in a dialect and from a point of view that have become more strange to us than we are apt to let ourselves imagine. Some central core of teaching or tradition lives on, but it gathers to itself new outlooks on the universe and new ways of feeling the meaning and value of life, which make the Christianity of any age peculiarly an expression of that age alone, and different in many subtle and some significant respects from forms of the same religion that have gone before or may come after. It is enough to mention great typical figures like Paul, Augustine, Francis, Dante, Aquinas, Luther, Wesley, Newman, Channing, to see that this is so. Each was a Christian in terms of the world of his time and by virtue of his unique genius.

III.

What most nearly concerns us is religion as it is today and as it will be tomorrow. What has philosophy to say as it looks at religion now? Different philosophers would, of course, give different answers according to their respective points of view. So far as I may venture to answer such a question in the name of contemporary philosophy, I shall doubtless show my special bias as well as my inevitable ignorance of many aspects of so vast a subject. Still, because the issues are such that no one is entitled to speak on them with dogmatic certainty, any honest survey may be helpful in some respects; and it is with a wish to be suggestive rather than conclusive that I offer the considerations that follow.

It seems to me, then, that religion today is confronting what is, in essential respects, a new world—made so by advances

in science and in the technical processes by which we can control natural resources and mould them to our use; by the industrial revolution, which is not even yet approaching its end; by the growing spirit of democracy and equality all over the world; by the increasing contacts between advanced and retarded populations, standing higher or lower in the scale of civilization; by the growth of great nations, including our own, into empires with world-wide political and economic relations; and by the development of a whole new range of international problems, heavily fraught with weal or woe for the humanity of the immediate future. All these changes are of vital import to religion, which must adjust itself, however slowly and reluctantly, to the tremendous demands of its swiftly-changing environment if it is to survive as a leading factor in human affairs. The philosopher notes that religion, throughout the past, has never failed to adjust itself in the end, though the process may have been a difficult one; and this gives him hope that the same thing will be true today and tomorrow. Indeed, as he looks about him, he sees many signs that the adjustment is steadily going on. His chief question, perhaps, is whether the conditions that religion has to face today are not so revolutionary that when the adjustment is made what will emerge as religion will not be so different from what most of mankind now recognizes as such, as to be almost unintelligible to men trained and steeped in our present ways of thinking. Let me point out some of the particular directions in which changes are going on.

Science has given us today a new universe, whose vastness alone is enough to stagger the imagination. Within the last ten years, astronomers have begun to talk in terms of unnumbered galaxies of star-clusters, really distinct universes, of which our own milky way, though it is hundreds of thousands of light-years across, is only one. Comparatively speaking, our solar system has shrunk to the merest speck in the immeasurable reaches of cosmic space where, as we build more and more powerful telescopes, more and more distant galaxies come into view. The geologist tells us that this earth on which we dwell, one of the smaller satellites of our sun, is already millions of

years old, and barring unforeseeable accident will endure for hundreds of millions of years more; perhaps, though not certainly, becoming at length as denuded of all signs of life, vegetable or animal, as its strange, silent companion, the moon. The biologist assures us that man is only the last and most highly endowed of the long series of organic beings that have appeared on the surface of the globe, many of which have been extinct for geological ages and are known to us now only by their fossil remains. So far from being a sudden creation, man has fought his way up through the whole range of animal forms; but yesterday he was hardly distinguishable from the higher apes, and even now his animal propensities are so strong that our higher civilization seems at times to be a thin and shaking crust over abysses of barbarism and savagery. The anthropologist asserts that all our beliefs and mental attitudes are only modifications of the most primeval human ways of thinking, religion itself showing survivals of the unreasoning fears and superstitions of our remotest ancestry. The psychologist declares that human behavior is simply animal behavior, progressively modified by intelligence, gregariousness, and the slow accumulation of a more and more complex social tradition. The sociologist says that we are only beginning to emerge from the dominance of past authority and proscription, and learning to take thought concerning more human and humane ways of regulating the relations of members of the social order to one another.

Nothing to compare with this has happened before in the history of human culture. Most of the ideas to which I have referred are as yet the possession of small groups of specialists. Yet they are being rapidly popularized, and are not wholly strange to any group of intelligent people. Is it too much to say that, taken together, they come near to sweeping the entire content of the older religious tradition clean out of the young and seeking minds that are becoming familiar with them?

The philosopher knows too much about religion to fall a victim to the easy fallacy of identifying it with the institutional forms it takes in our many churches. But he recognizes that organized and institutional religion must long play a conspicu-

ous part in our common life. And he cannot help feeling the contrast that he observes between the general mental attitude that prevails in our universities and institutes for scientific research and that which is characteristic of practically all forms of organized Christianity. Outstanding in the scientifically trained mind is its patient, unremitting search for truth, its utter receptiveness to new discoveries of fact, its willingness to try out any promising hypothesis, the tentativeness of its conclusions, forever subject to correction in the light of fresh evidence, and its absolute rejection of all weight of mere authority from the past. Organized religion seems, too often, to be clinging timidly to outworn ways of feeling and thinking, hallowed by long association and accumulated reverence. The religious mind is apt to be a one-track mind, trained to think that the greatest of problems can admit of only one solution; and further, that this solution is not still to seek, but was found and the question forever settled centuries ago by some church father or council, some early apostle or even by the Founder of Christianity himself.

The philosopher tries to see Jesus in his habit as he lived, and does not underestimate the unparalleled force with which he projected his personal influence into all future time. But he cannot help perceiving that the whole content of Jesus' mind, his entire attitude toward life, falls in with the age and country to which he belonged, and except for a few general affirmations which possess eternal validity does not touch effectively the circle of ideas in which we are accustoming ourselves to live. The notion that modern problems can be settled by appeal to the recorded sayings of Jesus seems to the philosopher a strange perversion of intellectual method. It is true that, by a process of unconscious selection and emphasis, many of us quietly drop out of our thoughts those aspects of his peculiar point of view that we can no longer assimilate, and reinterpret what is left of his teaching in a way to make it congenial to our prevailing beliefs. In this sense, indeed, each age of Christianity and each branch of the church has created for itself a Jesus of its own. Otherwise Christianity must probably have died before the end

of its first century, when it forsook the soil of Palestine and by making Jesus the god of a Hellenistic mystery-cult was able to transplant itself and flourish in the Graeco-Roman environment. It is not, with the philosopher, a question of the possible death of Christianity, much less of religion though plenty of religions have died. Christianity may undergo such further transformation that it would scarcely be recognizable by any Christians now alive; but, so long as mankind thinks and feels and acts, some kind of religion will be indispensable to us and to the generations that follow us in this earthly pilgrimage.

IV.

How would the philosopher like to see our present religious beliefs and practices modified, so as to adapt them more completely to the new outlook that science is revealing to us? The answer will depend on what kind of a philosopher he is, on the basic assumptions from which he takes his start, and the total vision of the universe and human life to which these have led him. For the sake of simplicity in stating the ultimate issues, I think we may rightly divide contemporary philosophers into two main types. First, then, I will try to outline the attitude toward religion of (1) naturalistic philosophers, and (2) idealistic philosophers; then, we may ask whether their conflicting answers will admit of a possible reconciliation.

(1) Very briefly, naturalism in philosophy is an extension of the standpoint of the sciences, and especially of physical science, which was not only the earliest to develop in the modern period, but by the exactness and the demonstrative character of its results came to serve as a model of what all the other sciences should strive to attain. In its older form, physics is concerned with the motion of bodies in space, and in its newer form with the far more refined and incredibly rapid movement of waves or particles in fields of force. By studying these motions, physics tries to account for the colored, audible, tangible world of sense-perception. The ultimate appeal is to perception, since nothing that cannot manifest its presence to some one or more of the human senses is material for science in this con-

ception of it. Now it is characteristic of the scientist as such to think not at all of himself, but altogether of his data; so that his method clearly involves one great omission, namely, the fact that a human mind is there at work, trying to reduce certain parts of its experience to rational order. As a man, he might admit this, but as a scientist he chooses to ignore it.

Nature is defined by Professor Whitehead as "what we perceive by the senses." This being what science undertakes to explain, some kind of a mechanical model becomes almost inevitably the analogy in terms of which the explanation is offered. The resounding triumph of Newton's law of gravitation toward the end of the seventeenth century, with its explanation of the movements of the solar system in purely mechanical terms, gave to this analogy a prestige that has never since been shaken, and until very recently was not even questioned. A vitally important consequence has been that, as the organic and social sciences have developed, they have followed the lead of the physical sciences and sought their principles of explanation likewise in mechanical analogies. Recent biology and psychology are conspicuous examples. Of course, the animal organism must be a vastly more complex piece of mechanism than an atom or the solar system; and for human behavior and social relations we must assume a bewildering amount of complexity. Here it is becoming apparent that any mechanical model fairly breaks down, and there are signs today that in the social sciences this point of view is being replaced by more adequate principles.

The older naturalism, based somewhat naively on the Newtonian physics, may not unfairly be called materialism, though Newton himself managed to combine with it an orthodox belief in God. Logically, it is hard to see how such a system can find room for anything that can properly be called religion. Quite recently, however, in fact since the opening of the twentieth century, a newer naturalism has begun to declare itself, of which this cannot strictly be said. This philosophy has been profoundly influenced by the point of view of biological evolution. It sees in the data handled by the whole group of sciences, from physics to sociology, a series of levels through which, by

means of ever more complex forms of organization, the assumed primordial matter has climbed up to man. Or, expressed in the terms of a succession in time, this evolutionary naturalism, or emergent evolution, as it has come to be called, sees the higher and more complex qualities as emergent from the lower and simpler ones. Examples of this would be life emergent from matter, and mind emergent from life.

It is clear that this later naturalism is susceptible of a religious interpretation. In point of fact, it has actually led on the one hand to a humanistic, and on the other hand to a theistic, type of religious belief. From the standpoint that regards evolution as the method of creation, humanity is obviously emergent from lower forms of vital organization. The universe so far as we know it seems to have culminated, thus far, in the production of man and of human society. But the higher, ideal values of humanity are only in process of realization. The process is bound to be a long one, and we cannot foresee how far it will go. May it not be that deity also is an emergent quality, not yet wholly emerged, but giving all sorts of indications of being on the way? Such is the opinion of one of the greatest of living philosophers, Samuel Alexander, and he has argued it so skilfully that by philosophers, at any rate, it can be treated only with profound respect. Lloyd Morgan, on the other hand, frankly says that for him the course of emergent evolution can have no rational explanation other than that it is the handiwork of God, and he means the God of Christianity.

(2) Idealism, our second type of philosophy, seems at first blush to be nearer to the traditional conception of religion, though some recent forms of idealism make it appear that this is probably not the case.

While naturalistic science and philosophy have scored their remarkable triumphs by virtually ignoring the mind that was doing all the work, modern idealism makes mind the central fact in its interpretation of man and the universe. So-called "matter," interpreted by electronic physics as consisting fundamentally of positive and negative electric charges or wave motions is after all only an inference from data given in sense-percep-

tion; that is, it is known to us originally in the form of phenomena, appearances to some mind. All that we know or can discover about the physical universe is thus at least partially mind-dependent. The efforts of certain forms of recent Realism to discount this fact can hardly be called successful. Evolutionary naturalism tries to account for mind as an emergent quality, conditional upon a high degree of nervous organization in living beings; and this is a half-truth, if nothing more. The idealist philosopher takes his stand within the mind itself, and from this point of view endeavors to give a consistent and complete account of human experience. His position is not one of antagonism to science as such, though he is not satisfied with the explanations offered by naturalism. He tends to stress the active, originative, creative aspect of mind, especially as it is displayed in the imposing structures by which, in the higher ranges of civilization, mind seems to externalize itself and exhibit its inner content objectively. I refer to such manifestations of what may be called "objective mind" as art in all its forms, morality, religion, philosophy—everything that constitutes the more developed culture and social institutions of the race. These are in no sense spontaneous gifts of nature, but deliberate creations of mind. In asserting their primary significance as containing all the higher values of life, idealism does not contend that mind is wholly above nature and separated from it by a gulf, as in the older sense of something supernatural. Nature, also, may be interpreted as a realm of objective mind, though in just what sense it is so, idealism finds it extremely difficult to say. The question is simply as to what we are to put first and what we are to put second in our initial assumptions. Naturalism, true to its scientific derivation, puts the emphasis on physical reality and makes mind secondary to that. Idealism, closer to traditional religion with its stress on the worth of the individual soul, puts the primary emphasis on mind, as what we know most directly in experience, and makes so much of nature as is external to mind in some sense derivative from it.

It might seem that idealist philosophy could be counted on

to give us a reasoned demonstration of God and personal immortality. The attempt has frequently been made, though seldom with conspicuous success. As with naturalism, but on different lines, we may distinguish two leading types of idealism. One of these, Absolute Idealism, maintains as its leading thesis that the universe consists ultimately of what it calls the Absolute and its appearances. Every item in our experience is in some degree an appearance of the Absolute. But as the Absolute is known to us only in and through its appearances, our knowledge of it, while perfectly real, is highly relative and incomplete. This position may be taken in a sense favorable both to belief in God and to belief in personal immortality; but its most accredited representatives do not admit either, in the generally received religious meaning. The Absolute, though it is the ultimate nature of things, is not properly God in any religious meaning of the term; and we, being merely appearances of the Absolute, return at death into its capacious bosom, as waves sink back into the ocean.

The second type of modern idealism, known technically as spiritual pluralism, subdivides into two distinctive forms. These agree in asserting that nothing has real existence in the universe but minds (or spirits) and their activities, such as perceiving, desiring, willing, acting, appreciating, loving. The theistic form of spiritual pluralism holds that the universe consists of one supreme spirit, God, and a multitude of subordinate, created spirits such as we are, though many are perhaps lower or higher than we in the scale of being. The humanistic form of spiritual pluralism can find no grounds in experience for asserting that a supreme mind, or God, is a factor in ultimate reality; but all the more for this reason, perhaps, this type of idealism is apt to be strongly persuaded of the immortality of all minds or souls.

I said that we would next look for a possible reconciliation of these current philosophical tendencies. The direction in which such a reconciliation may be hoped for, in my opinion, is in the mutual approach of emergent evolution and the pluralistic form of idealism. Human personality is an emergent value, and

the Christian ideal of a Kingdom of God on earth is the ideal of a human community in which all possible values are in process of realization. It is possible to conceive of God as the spirit of such a community, who is also the spirit of the universe. From the human point of view, which we occupy, such a deity may be taken as an emergent value, or rather as the sum and substance of all such values. This would mean, in more traditional terms, a progressive revelation of God to humanity, in which the Christian believer will naturally stress the outstanding contribution of Jesus Christ, but without necessarily excluding the contributions of a multitude of others, of every land and name.

V.

It happened that Christianity arose in a pre-scientific environment, so that its earliest documents are saturated with primitive ways of thinking, which the educated world of our time is fast abandoning. In order to appeal to thoughtful minds in the Graeco-Roman world into which it was so soon transplanted, the Christian faith and hope took on a world-view which it borrowed from Greek philosophy. Until about the year 1200 A. D., Christian theology was a late and on the whole a degenerate form of Platonism; after that the influence of Aristotle became predominant. Thomas Aquinas, the "angelic doctor" of the thirteenth century, gave to Roman Catholic theology its classical expression, which it still retains with minor modifications introduced by the Neo-Scholastic philosophy of the late Cardinal Mercier and his followers. Early Protestant theology was almost as much indebted to Aristotle. This means that the intellectual background of Christian belief has now, in the view of recent philosophy, become hopelessly antiquated. Copernicus and Darwin, between them, have given us a world in which Plato and Aristotle are still great figures of the past, full of suggestion and inspiration for all students of philosophy, but no longer models on whom to form our world-view. The question regarding Christianity which most interests the contemporary philosopher is whether it can adapt itself to the present

outlook in science and philosophy, and so continue to appeal to thoughtful and informed minds.

The conclusion to which we are led by our long discussion would seem to be something like this: Philosophy looks at religion, and especially at institutional Christianity, and finds it too closely bound up with traditional ways of thinking which the progressive part of mankind has abandoned. These are really older types of philosophy which the church once found suited to its purpose, but whose present utility is very doubtful. It has been the unfortunate habit of organized religion, with its one-track type of mind, to insist that only one solution of our deepest problems can be right, and hence that other proposed solutions must be wrong. Time out of mind, religious people have reasoned that those who do not believe as they do must, from that fact alone, be irreligious. Instead of patient research and a disposition to weigh alternative hypotheses, we have controversy, intolerance and sectarianism. To the philosopher this is deplorable, and he sees in it, moreover, a serious danger for the future of the church. If the churches insist on enforcing uniformity of belief they are bound, he thinks, in time to disintegrate. Already, today, a growing number of intelligent people are indifferent to the teachings of all the churches, even the most liberal. One reason is that, if an individual accepts the standpoint of the older science and of naturalistic philosophy, he is flatly called an atheist; while if he accepts that of the newer science and emergent evolution he is called a humanist, with the clear implication that he is merely an atheist in disguise. As the philosopher sees it, this will not do. The churches have no monopoly of religion; far from it. Largely on traditional grounds, they feel it incumbent upon them to insist on the two great doctrines of God and personal immortality. It is notorious that an increasing number of thoughtful people are wholly unable to acquire a clear conviction on either of these points. They find other ways of solving the problem of ultimate values in the universe and in human life that are more appealing to them. The result is that the churches lose, through indifference and neglect, the support of many of the best and keenest minds in

every community. If these leading minds, legitimately influenced by the intellectual approach of science and philosophy, largely through the teaching of our colleges and universities, are to be kept in contact with organized religion, the churches must abate their pretensions to be the ultimate repositories of truth and of the way of salvation, and take more of the humble, expectant, open-minded and self-critical attitude of the scientist and the philosopher. This, in so far as it can be accomplished, should mean a rebirth of religion into the larger and finer spirit of a new day and a new universe.

Philosophy thus finds in religion, as now organized, a lack of flexibility, an unwillingness to consider alternative ways of approach to its problems, a want of adequate self-criticism to amend its settled habits of mind, while at the same time it is unduly distrustful of the advances made by contemporary science and philosophy. The latter, when rightly understood, is trying to help religion by unifying and harmonizing the deliverances of science with those of all the other aspects of our complex experience and with the needs of practical life. In a word, philosophy could wish that religion, at least in the persons of its leaders and spokesmen, might become more truly philosophical; that is, more open to the new thoughts of a new day, more willing to go forward into untried ways, less ready to call men heretics or unbelievers or atheists because they cannot all come to one set of conclusions as to the deepest and obscurest mysteries of existence.

Philosophy, however, does not dream of replacing religion in the lives of men. It recognizes itself as the arduous pursuit of the few who, from liking or opportunity, can give themselves to its adventurous search. It is aware of its constitutional inability to speak to simple men in the concrete, pictorial language that they can alone understand. It has to appeal to the leaders, who will pass on what they can to their followers. It would help the churches rather than hinder them in their indispensable function of making the highest things of life dear and precious in the affections and purposes of people of all grades of intelligence, bowed down with daily cares and sorrows, bear-

ing the burden and heat of the world's work. Yet the philosopher would rather see all organized religion go down to decay and forgetfulness than have the sense of awe and wonder, of the encompassing mystery, of adoration for the supreme truth, goodness and beauty, of love and loyalty to the highest values, whether temporal or eternal, whether human or divine, die away out of the living hearts of men.

The Validity of the God-Idea

Felix A. Levy

Religion in the western world is primarily concerned with God and his relation to men and to the universe. While there have been some recent attempts to formulate a religion without Deity and hence without a theology, to strip God of all personality and human or supra-human qualities, yet even these scientific and humanistic substitutes feel the need of an idea of God that shall take the place of traditional divine being. The writer of the present paper being a theist will naturally discuss the reality and validity of the God-idea from this point of view.

So this paper begins with the assumption that God is the chief factor in the religious experience, this statement implying that there is religious experience. Other realms of human life, the scientific, for example, may be able to dispense with God, the religious domain makes him central, and man as a creature who works the soil of religion discovers and feels a need of a transfinite power. This God when found, or when experienced, satisfies an almost universal craving and the experience is vivid and convincing. Religion then postulates a divine order with the divine author of which man may commune. It would maintain that when an individual or a group has an idea of God there is something real to which this idea corresponds.

The word idea is used very loosely and modern thinkers reveal a tendency to avoid the term. It might be best at this juncture to say what we understand by the last word of our title and so try to avoid the frequent ambiguity attached to it. With this much I think all will agree that an idea arises in the mind, that it is mental. This does not mean, however, that it is exclusively mental, exists solely in the mind. For an idea has a reality on its own account, an existence that is other than purely subjective; nay, the only real being that is is that possessed by the idea. But, apart from this Platonic use of the term and

derived from it, even the ideas that the mind has, are of something actual or conceived, which usually correspond to something that has actuality outside of and independent of the instrument that is aware of them. The two senses of the term, then, the ideal, universal pattern of things and the function of thought that gives us knowledge of the nature of the world in which we move, converge. So the idea of God means our idea of a deity that corresponds to reality, and likewise it means an ideal of a universal, perfect kind that exists "out there" and "in here." The former shall occupy us for the moment.

As Hocking suggests, an idea is a piece of one's mind, a coin which serves as a unit of exchange, to pass pieces of mind on to others, to enable one to store up his valuables in convenient form, to measure and assess facts, etc.[1] An idea is always an idea of something, and when we think of an idea "*that* something shines through the transparent substance of the idea itself and our thought of the idea's object. Ideas are what we think *with*, not what we think *of*."[2]

If this be so, whenever we have an idea we find that it is imbedded, so to speak, in the matrix of the entire human personality. For purposes of discussion, of transmission to others, we may denude it of all its other elements, affective largely, but in so doing we are reducing it to a bare skeleton of what it naturally is—the flesh and blood that give it life are absent. An idea then is the result of the reaction of the whole personality and possesses elements largely incommunicable, which are not mental.

But what becomes of the Platonic ideas? Are they, too, what mind thinks with? No. This kind of idea, except for nominalists and their kin, has an existence of its own. Not being a physical object, it of course has not the kind of existence that the sensible world has, but it has a factual subsistence and objective being in the scheme of things. So the mind becomes aware not only of a realm in which primary but also in which tertiary qualities obtain. The mind's idea of a "univer-

1. "The Meaning of God in Human Experience, pp. 79-80.
2. Ibid.

sal" is no different psychologically from its conception of a tree, but emotionally it may make a difference. While from the psychological point of view all "ideas" are subjective, nevertheless it recognizes this objectivity. Religion, or better, the religious consciousness makes certain objective references from the contents of its experience and to call this purely subjective, as Leuba does, and conclude therefrom that religion is a branch of psycho-pathology, is to replace the whole religious life by a series of hallucinations. Not only the mystics but the great mass of men who believe in religion are then completely self-deceived.[1]

Our ideas are never purely mental—the whole personality goes into them. The intellectual feature may be foremost, may be all that it is possible to communicate, may even be the only permanent factor, but it never exhausts the content of the idea. When the scientist reduces his ideas of the physical world to the concepts with which he works, he is doing exactly what the ordinary man does in his everyday living, with the difference that the physicist divides much further than his non-inquisitive brother. But both sets of ideas have validity and reality, dependent upon the end in view. A table is always a table and never a group of electrons, dancing wildly, except for the purpose of finding the ultimate constituents of matter, which investigation excludes all other factors, such as roundness, serviceability, color, etc. The scientist has not only subtracted emotional reactions, but all others except one particular kind of division and redivision of constituent character.

Now the personality of man reacts in certain definite ways. By this I mean there are some universal experiences which produce ideas that are shared in common by all persons. Such are our ideas of our being alive, of a like condition among our fellows, of our capacity for thinking, of having ideas, and so on. Other ideas receive less widespread recognition; for example,

1. Leuba notes only what appears to him the resemblances between religions and morbid states of mind. He fails completely to mark the differences. A similar case of psychopathic aberration might be made out of the artist and the moralist.

gravitation, goodness, and God. The ultimate validity and reality of an idea rests on the recognition by others of its truth. A scientific idea is one that may be tested by all men; experiments to prove it can be repeated by anyone who chooses, and, since this personal variable of individual affirmation is ever present, no such idea is ever universally received. Of the idea itself, the best that is claimed for it by its proponents is that it is probable. All ideas are in a sense scientific because they must be tested, and general approval or disapproval sooner or later decides the fate of all ideas, not logical proof or disproof unless either of these latter receives general endorsement. So ideas are at best assumptions, growing out of certain immediate experiences. These last require constant testing to be sure. The idea of God is a similar assumption that grows out of all life and history.

All ideas, in the attempt to reduce them to ultimates, strike irreducibles—simple terms that defy definition. The physical world, so-called, may be explained satisfactorily by one set of ideas, but it does not follow that, because energy, quanta, radiation give us remarkable insight into certain kinds of behavior among the aggregates of atoms, we have thereby exhausted are possible explanations of the nature of the world. While mind is the only instrument we have to acquire knowledge, its application is not to be restricted to measurement or to mathematics.

God is an inference from the premises of existence as much as the theory of relativity is a postulate drawn from certain basic assumptions. To put this statement in the language of mathematical logic: Granted that the world possesses certain qualities, a, b, c, d, etc.; granted also that certain events occur, x, y, z, we may conclude that something is responsible for the order and the temporal as well as the logical sequence of things. That something the religious man calls God. But we must not jump at the conclusion that God is an Unknown or a Spencerian Absolute. The intellectual content of the idea may be perhaps so defined, but intellectual elements, as we saw, do not exhaust the idea. Our attitude toward the world is, and this is of the

essence of religion, not only rational, but emotional, æsthetic, moral, and so on.

Since the religionist deals with ideas that are much more surcharged with emotional content, his conclusions may of course be different from those of the scientist and the exclusively logical thinker, if such a creature be. We would even point out the limitedness of the physicist's ideas because of their almost purely rational character. Besides his view is asynoptic and only true for larger aggregates of electrons. He knows nothing of the individuals that comprise his aggregates. The scientific view of the world must be necessarily partial and one-sided, for it cannot take a synoptic view of things, leaving out of consideration, as it does, such vast areas of human endeavor as values; and when science does speak of art or morality, it can only touch upon the measurable portions of these, omitting as a consequence a pronouncement on their very essence. The truth of any idea does not rest solely on its intellectual content. Religion is an integrating force that integrates man and the world and the two together, and gets as a result of this process the idea of God. Some may reject this conclusion, may not need it either intellectually or emotionally, for we must remember there is no absolute compelling of such inference. The best we can give it is probability. Let us now take up in greater detail some of the arguments for the reality of our idea of God.

There is no single argument for the reality of God or of the validity of the God-idea, the whole defense consisting of a series of deductions, thus insuring a large amount of probability by the cumulative effect produced. Wherever we turn we shall find mystery. At the end of every inquiry, upon whatever road we pursue it, we shall find an inexplicable riddle. Rational procedure always meets the stone wall of the non-rational. Perhaps it must always be so, for we can never answer a "why" but can only reply "how" things happen. "Why" involves us in an infinite regress that can only be halted by saying God. Even if modern physics could reduce all to mechanism, which it certainly does not, or to laws of statistical averages, which likewise it can do only for large numbers of phenomena in do-

mains that admit of counting and not for single manifestation, even if mathematics can formulate relations that must be true for every possible world, we would still be confronted with mystery and would have to ask the unanswerable and inevitable question: Why is this the ultimate? This mystery at the end of all search, the religious consciousness solves with the answer, God.

The first striking fact, to the thinking man at least, is the miracle of his own thought. Somehow by thinking we can get knowledge of the universe, ourselves included, and the universe, despite irrationalities, corresponds in its behavior—laws as they are called—to the demands of rationality set up by the mind. If knowledge is at all possible or valid, we must assume that the grounds for it are rational. This is the basic assumption of all thinking, general as well as scientific. There seems to be a rational order in the cosmos; it presents a knowable system.[1]

The second mystery is that of creation, not only at some far off beginning, but the presence of new features, the "emergence of novelty" as it is called by Lloyd Morgan. Quantitative differences can never explain qualitative variations, and even if they did, we would still have to answer why. Life, for example, is an emergent, so is mind inexplicable in terms of predecessors. We can never explain the so-called higher in terms of the lower. Either we call the mystery God, or else we must be satisfied with no explanation, for, as Whitehead says, "Apart from the interventions of God, there could be nothing new in the world and no order in the world."[2] The "ultimate is creativity."[3]

The Philosophy of Religion has since Lotze been concerned with, in Höffding's phrase, "the conservation of values." While the creation of values is also a part of religious function, their preservation and enhancement, it is commonly agreed, form its special province. I know that there are some thinkers who on philosophic grounds would rule out values, yet we shall accept

1. When this paper was originally written I had not yet seen Brightman's "The Problem of God." I am indebted to pp. 148 ff for much of the following discussion.
2. Whitehead, "Process and Reality," p. 377.
3. Quoted by Brightman, p. 153.

the fact of their existence and worth. Very few, even of the materialists, would refuse a place in the scheme of things to truth, beauty, love and goodness. These are the things that give value to life. Perhaps they have an existence on their own account. They can hardly be explained as the mere accident of definite atomic arrangements. Their presence is as great a riddle as is matter itself. Have we not therefore the right to conclude that without a background in the universe in which realization of such values is possible, they could not be? For they are realizable and, though the world may be indifferent to ideals and hopes, the realization, surely in part, is possible. Does not this, too, mean God?

I have left out of discussion the presence of evil and disvalues in the world, for that would take us too far afield. I just wish to say that he who would draw his inferences from the evil and unhappiness in the world does not have the synoptic view, but one that is far too fragmentary to do justice to the facts. Evil has its part to play in the economy even of God's world, to act as a tension against which man must strive.

It might be charged that we are personifying God in the preceding discussion. Yet what else can we do? The finest fruit of the whole development of the ages is the human personality. It is *the best* we know. Its riddle, with its novelty of appearance, is certainly the most unique manifestation in a material world. It is the ever present fact of ourselves. Does not this make God reasonable? A spiritual consciousness such as is a human being can only be reached by another spiritual being. Our personality assumes a personality beyond. Personality can hardly be explained as a result of non-personal causes or precedents. What is highest and best in our natures we rightly attribute to God.

The consciousness of God's presence in a specific religious experience is another bit of evidence for the reality of God and the resultant idea. While it is true that the idea of God that most people have is not to be described in intellectual terms, but in those of human need,[1] nevertheless, some sort of con-

1. cf. Pratt, "The Religious Consciousness," p. 206 f.

cept results. But all ideas contain pragmatic elements.[2] Many psychologists of religion argue from the desire to the necessary existence of that which stills the want, comparing the religious appetite to hunger for food, sex satisfaction and social relations. Be that as it may, there is that in man that may be called the religious consciousness, even as there is an artistic or moral proclivity. While religious experience may not be different from general experience, surely its content points to an origin that has objective validity. The non-religionist cannot deny the central fact of the religious thrill, God, because he does not feel him, nor can he say He is unreal any more than the color-blind or the musically deaf can claim that certain shades and sound harmony do not exist because they are unaware of them.

Lastly, the God idea is to be judged as we judge all hypotheses. Does it help explain the scheme of things better than any other theory we might posit? Does it enable man to live more fully, richly and better than otherwise he would? The answer again of anyone who has felt and thus known God is an unqualified "yes." God does affect our lives, and our idea of Him[3] is vivid and objective and points to objective reality.

2. Ibid.
3. The idea of God is not true because it is practical, but if it is true, it ought to be practical. Brightman, op. cit. p. 162.

Whither Congregationalism?

PALFREY PERKINS

Some of us are old enough to remember the once popular song:

"I don't know where I'm going
But I'm on the way."

I sometimes feel that those words express with considerable accuracy the attitude of the average minister today. To be sure, they come nearer to describing the state of mind of ministers in the free churches, than they do that of clergymen or pastors who are "bossed" by bishops, sustained by synods, or shepherded by the Pope. *Do* we know where we are going? Do we know where we *ought* to be going? Have we any deeply considered philosophy of the task and function of our congregationalism? Can you or I answer with any real conviction the question "Whither Congregationalism?"

I am tempted to quote the brilliantly topsy-turvy sentences of Chesterton, who somewhere has said, "Unless a man has a philosophy certain horrible things will happen to him! He will become practical; he will be progressive; he will cultivate efficiency; he will put his trust in evolution; he will do the work that is nearest; he will devote himself to deeds not words!" And I am tempted to suggest that the fact that these horrible things *have* happened often to congregationalism proves that it has no philosophy of its task and that to compensate for this lack, our churches have turned often to the worship of efficiency, have entered the race to be up-to-date and have carried on a variety of activities quite unrelated to any dominating idea of what it is all about! No wonder a cynical bishop announces his intention of writing an essay on the subject "The Present Decay of Religion or the Activity of the Clergy in every Good Work!" I believe also it is this failure to know where we ought to be going which involves us often in that unequal competition with other agencies of helpfulness, so trying and vexing to many a

parson. And I am sure, but for this uncertainty about our real task, we should never make those blunders that we do in trying to absorb "our" people's energies in the small affairs of the church and then moaning over our failures, instead of trying to direct those energies out into the community in which our church is set, carrying into it such light and force and heat as we are able to generate by our particular dynamos of religion.

Beecher said long ago, "The glory of the church is to multiply the men outside of the church who work—this is but an altar whence every man is to take his kindling brand and go out of the church to work everywhere." Church work—as we so often do not recognize—is *not* primarily serving on committees, eating suppers or teaching in the church school, but helping to set up the kingdom of God in the world, with passion, devotion, intelligence and will drawn from the deep springs of spiritual life and experience which the churches should feed with water from the heights. But *do* our churches feed these deep springs of the spirit? I have a feeling that somehow that great function is often but indifferently performed. A Roman Catholic poet was talking about doctrine with a Protestant who expressed himself as puzzled over "The Real Presence"—"Ah" gently murmured the poet, "what you have in *your* churches is "The Real *Absence!*" Absent too often from our congregational worship is the sense of illimitable destiny—and the challenge of the Eternal, which for ages have been compelling inspirations in the sanctuaries of religion. Of course you may say that that sense and challenge accompany sacramentalism, which expresses itself through ritual and ceremony and mystery, in a church in which beauty plays its all-important part, and that these things do not belong, by *nature,* to Congregationalism. This is indeed one of our problems.

For it is true that Congregationalism is essentially a preaching church. It turned away and has kept away from that Mediaevalism which in its own time and surviving into our own day, has emphasized the performance of spiritually potent acts making available to men and women the sacramental prerequisites of salvation, and which has looked upon preaching as an inconsequential appurtenance to the transaction of wor-

ship—But Protestantism from the very beginning has insisted that nothing in religion is as important as preaching and this insistence was carried to its extreme of consistency in New England Congregationalism. For three centuries, congregationalists have affirmed that the prime function of the church is the proclamation of christian faith and practice, and that the supreme sacrament of religion is the preaching of the word. In a world then, which no longer looks to Religion for the assurance and advancement of post-morten salvation but rather for help toward the realization of human possibilities *here*, and which rightly denies to Religion any monopoly of all the ways and means to that realization—whither Congregationalism?

Whither the preaching church? Its prestige as an utterer of the sacred word is gone. The unique distinction of its preaching function is challenged by the press, the magazines, the radio, the luncheon clubs, the welfare organizations, from which a veritable fountain of verbal stimulus to better and higher living daily gushes forth! Mr. Bruce Barton as you know, over-whelmingly impressed by the power of the radio to transform all our institutions and folk-ways, *will have it* that the time is not far distant when public assemblies of any kind will be unnecessary and anachronistic, and there will therefore be no churches but in their place only *broadcasts* from community cathedral studios. Without pausing too seriously over this vivid prophecy, we may at least ask ourselves: what *is* the future of the preaching church? Will its services be required in the new world of scientific equipment and if not, will its passing from the scene make any difference? If the argument and propaganda of our "intellectuals" and critics, our exhibitionists of "the Modern Temper," should convince the world that everything which it has known as religious experience, has always been, is, and always will be either an illusion or a survival of primitive habits and customs—then it would seem that any church interested in the intellectual interpretation of religion—is doomed to inevitable disintegration. And even if, in spite of the trend of modern thought—there should remain unshaken a belief in the validity of religious experience, what will become of the church whose functions—prophetic, pastoral,

and educational, are one by one being stripped from it by forces characteristic of the new world?

Many a man and woman who can sit in an easy chair by an open fire and hear the word of life come thrillingly from the loud speaker will think twice before going to church! Many with personal problems, tangles of relationship that need straightening out, will seek some clinic of personal counsel, some skilful psychiatrist rather than their pastor. Crowds will buy the last magazine for its discussion of vital and absorbing questions, and feel confident that they are learning more than they would in the classes or forums at the church. To these people, what has the church to offer save possibly a kind of companionship and association competing somewhat feebly with the fraternal organizations? To be sure there is the Sunday Service—but if the reality of its prophetic, its pastoral, and its educational functions—has vanished, it survives only as a kind of respectful gesture toward the hallowed past.

And yet even if all these things are happening and *will* happen—it is likely that the church will still be here and at work. Life after all is a relationship of whole persons. In these days of specialization we sometimes are tempted to question that. I go to the hospital for a slight operation, and to the surgeon I am just a pair of tonsils, nothing more! The man at the plant who does a certain job hour in and hour out, is just the doer of that job,—nothing more! Even the student in some of our great educational factories—is just a candidate for the degree—nothing more! These instances illustrate the tendencies which today prevent life being what it ought to be—a relationship of whole persons. And to counteract them, still stand the home and the church. The home feels the effect of the same kind of influences as have affected the church, stripping it slowly of *its* functions. Economists, psychologists, and sociologists are busy forecasting a home in the future which shall be only the shell of what a home *has* been. But—that which makes the family a unit—that relationship of whole persons: that remains permanently powerful. In spite of economic pressure, and woman's independence, and changes in manner of life and the theory and practice of companionate or trial marriage—and

all the other hostile forces, the man and the woman in the circle of their children—will continue to be the *first* social unit, the source where love begins.

So it will be with the church. People *will* turn on the radios; they *will* visit the psychiatrist; they *will* devour the magazines, and attend their lunch clubs and their lodges—but the *church,* with people in it, with its public word of prophetic power and its common worship, with its warm, comradely fellowship, its bright festivals on holy days, its clustering children. its wider outlook on the world and its larger purposes for good —this will continue to touch the individual at more points—more *wholly* than any other institution of society—and more important still, it will continue, as no other organization can, to create in the individual a sense of his own worth.

That's it—there lies the great hope for the church—in its ability to create that sense of worthfulness in people. Never has it been needed more than it will be needed in the age into which we are moving. The problems of the human spirit which have been supreme since there *was* a human spirit, will remain to be solved. The baffling mystery of life, the tragedies of frustration and sin, the aching desire for "the sound of a voice that is still," the clinging, as the darkness of the unknown gathers, to the support of the Everlasting Arms, these human needs remain. But there *will* be needs not known before, created by the tendencies of this newer world of ours, needs making a more urgent demand than ever for a religion which endows the individual with a sense of human worth. The very specialist who knows nothing but tonsils, the men who do nothing but turn screws so many times an hour or catch red hot rivets in a tin pail all day long—these men, because they are men, will develop a longing for a place where they can catch some glimpse of the vast panorama of mankind's encounter with destiny, in one tiny corner of which, their own lots are cast. The men and women who are only numbers—or who know *other* men and women only as numbers, whose social contacts are utterly impersonal, will grow hungry for wholeness of soul—And in deeper ways, the growing and wider spread knowledge of the stupendous facts of this mysterious Universe will over-

whelm men with the sense of human nothingness and the relative unimportance of the earth and all its fortunes, and will put into the cry, "What is man that Thou art mindful of him," a note of despair which the psalmist never knew.

Can men *endure* the new age without religion? Can they bear their new knowledge without Religion's assurance of and concern for, the worth of every human individual? And can any church better meet the ultimate demand of modern men and women for help to see life steadily and see it whole, than the church which *preaches?* Neither all the beauty of worship amid perfect architecture and effective ritual and glorious music, on the one hand, nor all the hectic activities of a semi-religious club, on the other, will avail to preserve the distinctive function of Congregationalism in a changing world. For Congregationalism by its very genius, is concerned with religion as truth and as a way of life and such a concern cannot be transmitted to the world and projected into the world, save by the sacrament of preaching. The *Whence* of Congregationalism is the bare, cold meeting house, devoid of every aesthetic advantage, set, perhaps, on a bleak hill, from whose high pulpit the vitalizing influence of great preaching flowed forth, to create a religious life of power and splendor and steadfast devotion. The *Whither* of Congregationalism may lead into churches of rare and noble beauty with ornate and impressive forms of worship—or into bee-hives of institutional and organizational activity—but there will be no continual renewal of its life except as the living impulse of men and women is inspired to a high devotion by the utterance of truth through personality. Indeed it would be a great misfortune, it seems to me, should Congregationalism take the road of ritualism and elaboration of worship, *as an end in itself or in order to attract the crowd.* For its more exalted calling is to dwell near the sources of truth; to disregard accessories and enter the Holiest of Holies; to maintain a virile, thoughtful, truth-seeking, free ministry and to encourage a personal, unmediated acquaintance between the human soul and the Divine.

Whither Congregationalism? Towards a more devoted ministry to individuals, I say. As I have already suggested

there is no likelihood that the strain of modern life will leave individuals without the need of religion. There is, rather, every likelihood that the many and complex adjustments of the newer world will demand an increase of inner strength. This is why I emphasize the ministry to individuals. Their inner resources must be enriched and deepened and intensified. To do this the church must renew its interest in and its mastery of religion's immemorial function, "spiritual direction." One would have said that this was the one function destined to remain exclusively in the hands of religion, no matter what happened to other formerly religious functions like education, the care of the sick, charity, and social welfare.

And yet in a decade we have seen the rapid disappearance of the role of moral counsellor from the list of parts which the minister must play. With an amazingly swift response, people have turned to the new science and method of psychiatry and psycho-therapy for the solution of difficult personal problems. Perhaps the swift response is not so amazing—if we consider how far outside the consciousness of organized religion that method and practice are, and how naturally one would turn—if afflicted with chronic melancholia for example,—from religion's attempt to cure it by intensifying one's consciousness of sin, to the psychological clinician who, in spite of vast uncertainties, still knows more than ever has been known before, about human personality and the mechanisms of human behavior, and through his knowledge is able to effect cures and bring peace and wholeness. This whole trend, in an age when individuals are swallowed in systems, is a saving grace, for it has reemphasized the individual's importance. And it cannot be urged too strongly that Congregationalism—whose very genius has been its grip on men and women in the formation of character and personality—must *retain* that grip by learning much more adequately how to deal with the emotional and mental and moral life of individuals. The Congregationalism *whence* we came, was so skilful in concentrating upon foresightedness with regard to individual salvation that no sacrifice was too great to make, no cross too heavy to bear—in order to

gain the heavenly crown—It was a sound principle—but to *our* world the reward seems too remote. We question, today, the accuracy of Religion's knowledge of heavenly things, and even its trustworthiness as a guide to celestial bliss. The Congregationalism *whither* we are moving must somehow make the *old* imperative effective for the new and more credible "here-afters" of the modern world, must somehow make an immortality in the eternity—of social and moral values just as persuasive as were the old super-natural crowns and thrones. This can be done only as individuals are taught—what is so inaptly phrased in our Unitarian word "Salvation by Character"—that character *is* the human capacity to sacrifice momentary satisfactions for *permanent* satisfactions and to realize that the world's good is one's own and one's own good is the world's.

And that suggests another answer to the question Whither Congregationalism? Still true to its native genius, it must move on the *pioneer's* way. More and more our churches appear to be but fractions—if not *factions*—of the community, serving certain of its quiet needs—instead of being *creators* of the community, which is their reasonable service. It is true, I think, of churches in general, that they are often not even as good as their communities—that their religion is not harnessed to the community spirit and civic ideals of their environment, with the result that neither the community *ideal* nor the church *religion* is what it ought to be. This comment may be untrue of churches particularized as Congregational—but I submit, nevertheless, that Congregationalism is *not* busy enough pushing its thought and action out onto the moral frontiers of life. Difficult? Yes—especially in a country in which inertia is almost epidemic and "normalcy" once came near being a fatal disease. Difficult—but yet preeminently the task of free religion—the task of the frontiersman who goes out from the fortified block house and blazes a trail into unoccupied territory. We are too complacent and satisfied with the block house and garden of our moral world—a garden already partially cultivated and fertilized with christian ideals. We dig it over and over and plant the seed of amenities and graces and satisfactions. But does it need

any saying that the ethical achievement of any religious organization must be relevant to the basic moral and social needs of its world? Congregationalists, by and large, are people whom circumstances have protected from the brutalities of life in the raw—of race inequality, and economic injustice, and industrial *malaise*, and social crime. The people who are by the world labelled "religious," are often just those comfortable and unconsciously unintelligent people who do not keenly feel the urgent problems of our present life. And in our churches they are the great majority.

Congregationalism is indigenous to a world of people who are but slightly aware of the tragic aspects of the larger world. It was not ever thus. The *Whence* of Congregationalism was on new frontiers—the moral frontiers of purity in church and state, the spiritual frontier of a religion which should be for every man a new and living way of immediate access to his God, even the physical frontiers of a wilderness beyond an ocean, where religion could and did have vitality and reality. The *Whither* of Congregationalism must be also on new frontiers if it is to regain and retain vitality and reality, today—and tomorrow. There must be the same thrust over the moral frontiers of our time, into the jungles of race-relations, the thickets of organized industry, the swamps of luxurious materialism, the deserts of international politics. We must dissolve Religion's entangling alliance with the prevailing prejudices of contemporary civilization; emancipate it from its slavery to the mediocrities of contemporary life. The mere consciousness of this entanglement and this serfdom is a good beginning—but it is *only* a beginning. Has free religion not enough red blood to live its own life? Must there be some kind of transfusion, some sort of revival before it will set itself vigorously against the wrongs that ring us round? Rather the *contrary* is true—and if Congregationalism grows heroic again it will find *itself*—for moral and social heroism is not the *fruit* of Religion—that tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations—but rather its *root*. The moral leadership of our generation will and must utterly disregard the preaching church,

unless the preaching church makes itself the pioneer, the heroic blazer of new trails, in a prophetic ethic adequate to the generation's need.

"Has the night descended?
Was the road of late so toilsome? Did we stop discouraged, nodding on our way?
Yet a passing hour I yield you, in your tracks to pause oblivious,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!
Till with sound of trumpet,
Far, far off the day-break call—hark! how loud and clear I hear it wind;
Swift! to the head of the army!—swift! spring to your places,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

Whither Congregationalism? Not a word have I said about the theological direction, and very few words regarding it, *shall* I say. Doctor Holmes, you remember, once wrote "Protestantism means, Mind Your Own Business"—and Congregationalism is of course the very quintessence of Protestantism. We dare to claim that we understand and share the mental and spiritual attitude of that Greek General who when he had liberated Syracuse was at once set upon by a demagogue hurling charges and accusations against him, and who there-upon cried—"I thank the immortal gods that through their blessing upon my arms, it has been possible for every man of Syracuse to think and say whatever he pleases." The freedom of Congregationalism has its incidental disadvantages just as Progress has. There are men among us to whom has come a vision of truth, an opening into the future—for which other men among us may not be prepared. Then how easy it is for *those* to feel, just because *these* do not see what *they* see, that *these* are hypocrites or foes to their truth! But they are not! The sincere Congregationalist must be convinced that his own right to individual opinion lays upon him the highest obligation possible to work for the creation of individual opinions in others. Congregationalism's fearless dependence on a polity without ecclesiastical authority and a faith without creedal fixity, is the very heart and spirit of true democracy. And what is this faith in freedom, but faith in man's capacity to know and to make known God—*God,* for

some perhaps an emotionally satisfying idea, for others perhaps an intellectually satisfying concept, but for *all*, a *power*, to be practically laid hold of for the salvation of the world from deadly ills and the fulfillment of the world's vast possibilities for good.

Too much of our preaching, I am sure, reflects the spiritually disorganized conglomerateness of the age—with here and there strangely anachronistic vestiges of an outgrown religion. It is either unreservedly contemporary with no impulsive force toward the Eternal, or it is so "behind the times" as to make no contact whatever with "today," except by way of escape. We are questers—we preachers—and that is all to the good—but after all we ought, at least in our ambitions, to be "Gospellers," as well. And too rarely is our preaching a *gospel*. Whatever else the preaching church does in the morally and spiritually turbulent world of our time—one thing it must aim at—to give men and women such a conviction of the eternalness of values and ideals as shall be at once an anchor for the human spirit and a directing compass for its voyages.

But to do this, Congregationalism will have to overcome the current fashionable antipathy to theology as such—the modern urge to have done with *all* theology just because we have long ago got rid of a *particular* theology. The freer a religion is, the more must it be on its guard against making its freedom into a religion. "Freedom—for *what?*" it must ask. Freedom is a *way*, not an end. We have freed ourselves from creeds in order to make finer and truer creeds. And we can never inspire individuals to "seek first the Kingdom of God"—if "God" the word, not only means not what it has meant to the christian generations, but means nothing at *all* to *us*.

As free religion becomes heroic in its endeavors after a better world, as its reason grows courageous, to use Dr. Jack's phrase, as it yields to the conviction that what it finds best *in* humanity and of supreme worth *for* humanity—must somehow be related to meanings *beyond* humanity, more and more will it discover that the everlasting creative life, that quickening vitality which moves toward Truth, Beauty, and Goodness—*is God*. The Congregationalism whence we are come, has often preached devotion to the far off Deity while it remained indif-

ferent to human welfare, and love for a Heavenly Father while it tolerated the hatred, exploitation, and murder of earthly brothers. And if the Congregationalism *whither* we are bound, cannot thus preach the gospel—and it certainly can *not* and *must* not—it can and must open lives to that universal quickening vitality *in* men and *of* them—which through *their* creative acts of moral power can transform the possibilities of existence into ever new realities, till "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." I believe that Congregationalism, theologically, must move out into the realm of what W. P. Montague's amazingly helpful little book *"Belief Unbound,"* calls "a Promethean Religion"—Promethean because animated by the spirit of creative newness. Listen to his words: "There is at least a chance that the cosmos as a whole has a unitary life and consciousness, and that the evolutionary *nisus* is its will, which, though not omnipotent, is omnipresent. And if there is a kind of stillness, and if one can contrive a queer little turn of the heart away from what one knows to be mean, there is a chance, however, small, that a union with the holy spirit of this Promethean God will be attained, and that, by such a union, one's world would be made radiant, and one's life become a high romance." Dr. Hosmer sings

"Go not my soul in search of Him
Thou wilt not find Him there,"

and Rufus Jones puts it in prose, "we do not need to go 'somewhere' to find God. We only need to *be* something."

Let this be the gospel of the preaching church—and whither Congregationalism? Into ever deeper and wider creative living, to the end of achieving for all men a world of Freedom, Fellowship, Faith, and Truth.

Humanism in Religion Examined*

I have seldom met a more admirable little book than this by Professor Hutcheon. It reveals a cultured personality with integrity of mind and broad sympathies. There is recognition of the good sides of the humanist movement in religion in this book but a query as to whether it has the power to meet the deepest needs of human life and as to whether it relates man adequately to the cosmic process of which he is the outcome. Both of these are basic queries. What I intend to do in this review is to sketch the position taken and to indicate my reaction to some of the criticisms.

The introductory chapter is largely historical. He points out that humanism is a term with rich associations. It puts a stress on the human and upon human values. Every now and then some race or some gifted group has wakened up, made the grand discovery of itself and started out to live by its own direction and for conscious ends. Humanism expresses the will to live valiantly and abundantly. The Age of Pericles can be spoken of as humanistic and so, in many ways, can the period of the Renaissance. A peculiar feature of the nineteenth century was the depressing effect of a reductive naturalism led by science, on the one hand, and an absolutism taught by an idealistic metaphysics, on the other hand. The individual felt himself almost annihilated. Our own day has seen the rise of a revolt in philosophy against both of these positions. Pragmatism represents a rebellion against absolutism, and evolutionary naturalism, one against a reductive naturalism. In religion, it must be admitted that traditional supernaturalism is no longer credible to the educated man. What, then, are we to do? Can we accept the positive element in humanism and reject its negations?

Modern religious humanism has a broader foundation than did such a movement as positivism. For instance, it is aware

*By Robert J. Hutcheon, Pub. The Meadville Theological School, Chicago, 1931, 75 cents.

of the results of comparative religion and anthropology. In his second chapter, Hutcheon has some admirable things to say about human creativeness in language and the arts. Man as creator is only a further illustration of the experimental, forward-looking, whole-making process of life itself. And religion is an expression of feeling and imagination. As a result of man's peculiar endowment religions spring up among human groups at a certain stage of their cultural evolution as naturally and inevitably as languages do. But, while spirits and gods have been psychologically real, it does not follow that they were ontologically real. Antiquated deities go out of business. There is always the possible question of actual existence. But what were the values associated with these gods? Partly miraculous, partly moral, partly as energizers of the will. But we must not forget the bad side of the picture. The gods were also defenders of custom and tradition. And here I come to my first protest. Writes Hutcheon: "If man were only an earth-bound animal, this power of mere belief would be completely unintelligible." Must we not be empirical and discover what kind of an animal man is? It is so easy to introduce the supernatural in a subtle form by assuming that man's activities couldn't possibly express his nature. Of course, man is not a mere brute. He does have intellect and creative imagination and social heritage. To explain how it came about is the problem of scientist and philosopher. That it came about is a brute fact.

With the entrance of critical reason, doubt also enters. Childish religious beliefs are outgrown. Popular, superficial education does not go far, but a deeper-going education forces a reconstruction of thought. But the danger will be that a profound confusion as to the source, significance, permanence and authority of human values will arise. This danger is real. The humanist admits it and shows that the Churches have done nothing to correct it, that their perspective maintains the tradition that the sanctions of values must be supernatural. There is need here of much constructive work on the part of science, religion and philosophy. The question of immortality obtrudes itself at this point for the first time. I suppose the view of the

naturalistic humanist is that facts are facts and that, in the long run, it does no good to blink them. There are tragedies; life is dangerous; promising youths are cut down in their promise. *That* is the kind of world it is. *That* is always a possibility in human life. But we shall come back to this question in connection with a later chapter.

In Chapter IV, Hutcheon examines the reaction against humanism. He begins by putting the argument on a high level. "If humanism is to be refuted it must be shown to be inadequate to those who live on the thought-level where it appears, that is, to those who fully accept in principle the evolution of religion and its Gods, etc." The final test is, he thinks, reasonableness. And this reasonableness is not merely a matter of logic in the abstract but of a due recognition of certain basic needs of the human personality as well, its scope of action and its assurance of worth. Since Professor Hutcheon admits that the appeal to authority is not justified in these matters, I shall omit his quotations from Hartley Alexander and Nicholas Berdiayev. They are interesting but I find that I do not think in the fashion these men do. I am not an abstract individualist but a socialist interested in all sorts of human values with enough irony in me to keep me from being a sentimentalist. It's a fair show, and I am a fair sportsman, and I have a fair measure of human sympathy. I suppose that, in all these matters, I am somewhat of an Aristotelian: I do not expect too much from life but I manage to keep a zest in it. And I would like to see what could be made of life if there were more planning and more justice and more applied intelligence. It has never seemed to me that Christianity was strong on planning or intelligence and its sense of justice was accordingly of a rather sentimental type. A page of the New York Times resumé of Easter sermons fairly sickens me. What can be hoped from men such as these? Are these educated men? Is it a farce?

But I must hurry on. Hutcheon represents a high level of approach. His chapter on values overlooked by humanism was extremely interesting to me. He is quite right in his emphasis upon inponderables. Humanism must make its con-

tact with feeling and will. It must have a message. To me, this message is that of creativity, achievement, expression. It is the message of enjoyment and zest and fellowship. And I wonder how far the Humanist Unitarian Churches would go with me on this point. It would take us out into the large ocean of politics and economics and education. We must wed Hebrew outspokenness with Greek intellect and our own experimental touch. To clear away the old theology is but a precondition. Nor do I advocate a society of extroverts. I am not a pragmatist. I have in me something of the poet and the metaphysician. But why is the humanist barred from this encircling awareness? What our author calls a sense of dependence I would call a sense of realities. But a sense of realities does not preclude aspiration and rational enthusiasm. I am not a New Englander of the old tradition discussed by Henry Adams. As for serenity, the naturalist is not shut out. He gains it by insight and self-mastery as did Spinoza and by interest in human life. I quite agree with Hutcheon that the soul of America must be asleep. One reason? The acquisitive instincts were whipped up too much. Life has been made shallow. It was neither peasant nor cultured.

And so we come to the more technical ending. I quite agree, again, that the theory of the self is extremely important for the philosophy of humanism. I know of Pratt's interpretation of my view of the mind-body situation. I have always held it to be based on a misunderstanding. To me laws never control for they are not realities. An organic system expresses its nature in its behavior. And human nature is plastic and delicate and complex and highly integrated. Here is the meaning of emergence. The brain is at the mental level. And, to me, it can be understood only in terms of what I have called the double-knowledge approach. The efficacy of consciousness seems to me inseparable from the efficacy of mental organization, but I look upon consciousness as intrinsic to the activity of a mind-brain system. It does not act from outside because it is not outside nor is it a special form of energy. It is intrinsic to an awareness of pattern which is at one and the same time neuro-mental and conscious. That there are subtleties here

cannot be denied. In my opinion, it is the most difficult problem the human mind has to face. It has, as yet, hardly the necessary categories.

Finally a word about the push back of emergence. As Professor Hutcheon points out, I have refused to appeal to any principle but that of creative synthesis, the tendency to organization under favoring conditions. The higher levels of evolution are local. Evolution does not apply to the universal collectively but only distributively and in parts. I am content to follow the facts in a pluralistic and empirical way.

I suppose that the chief difference between the author and myself is that he desires a Determiner of Destiny of a semi-monarchical sort, whereas I look upon mankind as working out its destiny under mundane conditions.

Roy Wood Sellars.

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